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Understanding Queensland Teacher's Perspectives of Achievement to Empower Excellence within the Australian Curriculum

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A moment to consider...

When you think of a gifted student who is "achieving well," what immediately comes to mind?

What does gifted achievement look like to you?

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Make it matter

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Defining Giftedness

As Gagné's (2020) conceptualisation and definitions of **giftedness** and talent are dominant in historic Queensland state education policy and provisions, Gagné's (2020) Differentiating Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) will be used to frame analysis and findings (Merrotsy, 2017; Slater, 2018).

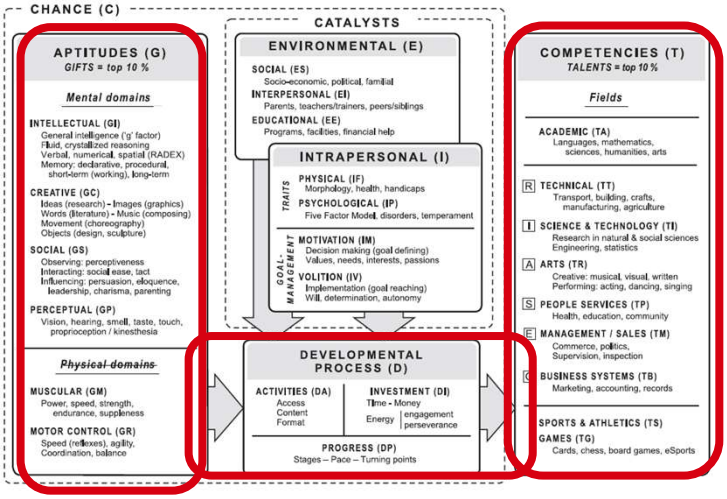

Figure 1: Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talents (Gangé, 2020).

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Giftedness in the Australian education context

Two federal inquiries considering the needs of gifted students in Australia have taken place.

- 1988 *Australian Senate Select Committee Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Children* (Commonwealth of Australia, 1988)
- *2001 Senate Inquiry into The Education of Gifted Children* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2001).

Finding reported:

- "many of the gifted **will not achieve to their full potential, unless special educational provision is made** for them" (Commonwealth of Australia, 1988, p. 177).
- gifted students were **suffering disadvantages as their needs were not being met** as they were **unrecognised and/or underachieving** (Commonwealth of Australia, 2001, p. xviii).
- identified the issue of "**tests with ceilings that are too low**" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2001, p. 42).
- "…**curriculum needs to be differentiated** for gifted children, and this applies **whether teaching is done in an ability grouped setting or in the comprehensive classroom**" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2001, p. 42).

With no nation-wide policy on gifted education, advocacy and provision for the specific learning needs of gifted students varies across Australian states and territories (Rowley, 2012).

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Gifted education policy in Queensland state education

2001
DOE provided a submission to the 2001 National Senate Inquiry on *the education of gifted and talented children* (DOE, 2021).

2004
DOE released the *Framework for Gifted Education*, consisting of *the Policy for the Education of Students who are Gifted*, and the *Guidelines for Acceleration* (revised 2008).

2008
Gifted Students Action Plan 2008-2010 to support schools in implementing the Framework. *The Action Plan* consisted of 5 key strategies (e.g., Identification processes; Collaboration/Partnerships; Leadership, Teachers' Knowledge, Development and Skill; Students) (DOE, 2008).

2013
The *Framework for Gifted Education* (DOE, 2008) was repealed in 2013 and replaced by the *Curriculum provisions to gifted and talented students* (DOE, 2013). These brief documents outlined school responsibilities concerning identification, curriculum provisions, communication with parents, and acceleration (DOE, 2013).

2016
The *Curriculum provisions to gifted and talented students* was updated in 2016 and required schools to have 'collaborative management' of curriculum provision, outlined identification procedures with data sources, and provided clearer examples characteristics of gifted students (including underachievement) (DOE, 2016; Walsh & Jolly, 2018).

2022
The *Curriculum provisions to gifted and talented students* was removed from the DOE webpage with the release of the updated P-12 CARF in 2022, however these are still used by many schools to inform school- based policies, provisions and decisions when catering for gifted students.

Presently, 'gifted and talented students' are listed in the Inclusion Policy (DOE, 2021) and under "groups and individuals who require tailored supports" in the K-12 Framework (DOE, 2024, p.20) which establishes the right of every child to access education appropriate to their needs, limited information specific to gifted students is included and requirements for determining and recording differentiation are largely vague; provide tailored supports to "extend" or "enrich" student learning through focused and/or intensive differentiation (DOE, 2024).

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Achievement in the Queensland state education context

Within the Queensland state education system, achievement is most commonly referred to in curriculum resources, policies and guiding documents, with reference to summative assessment measures and results (DOE, 2024; QCAA, 2019).

In the context of Queensland classrooms, the highest measure possible is an A standard at the achievement standard of the enrolled year level as, "the student must be taught, assessed and reported against the achievement standard of their enrolled year level" (DOE, 2024, p. 27).

Furthermore, as Queensland state education teachers are only required to report "the student's achievement against expected standards" it is essential to understanding the expectations of teachers for gifted students, their perceived learning needs, and how these factors thwart or support their achievement (DOE, 2024, p. 39).

Gifted students need additional supports to develop their gifted potential (Ronksley-Pavia & Neumann, 2020).

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Underachievement

Although definitions of underachievement vary throughout the literature, Reis and McCoach's (2000) seminal work – *The underachievement of gifted students: what do we know and where do we go?* – identified three common themes in operational and conceptual understandings of giftedness:

- underachievement as a discrepancy between ability and achievement;
- a discrepancy between predicted achievement and actual achievement",
- "a failure to develop or utilize latent potential" (p. 153).

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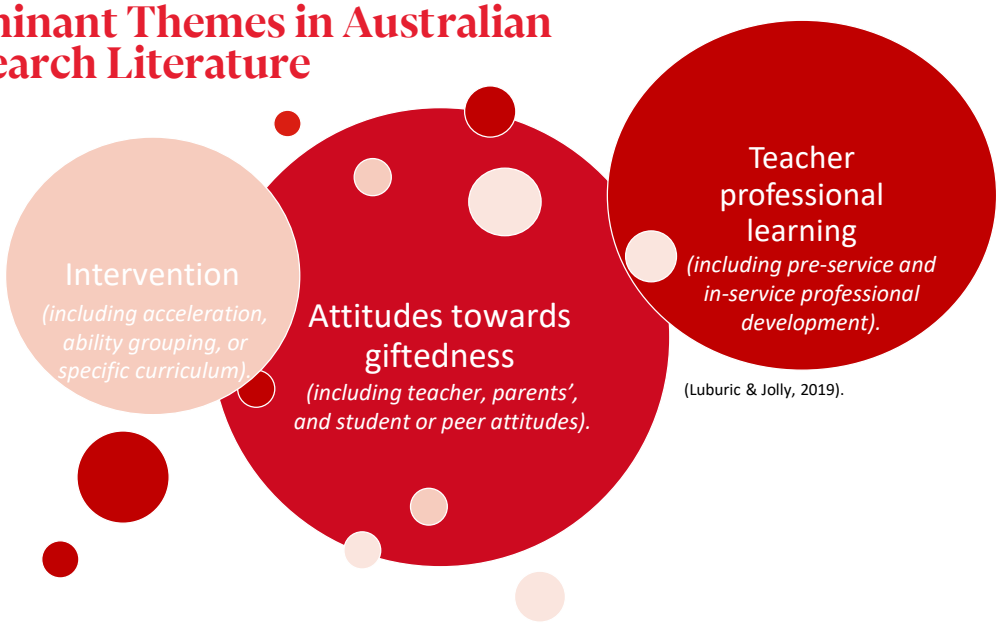
Dominant Themes in Australian Research Literature



(Luburic & Jolly, 2019).

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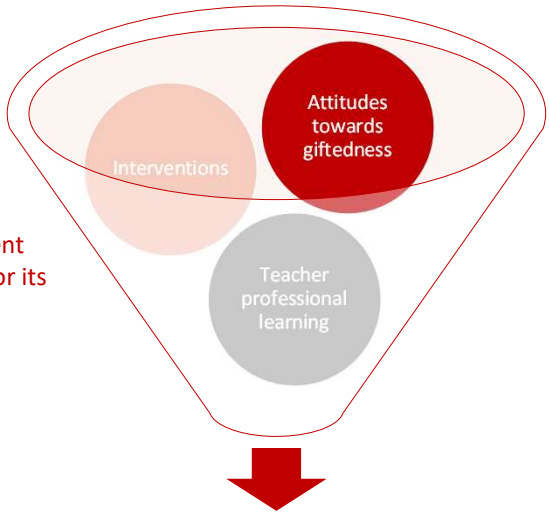
Research Gap

Studies typically focus on the causes of gifted underachievement or strategies and interventions for its reversal.



Previous research has not specifically explored how teachers perceive gifted student achievement within the Queensland state education context.

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Aim and Research Question

The study explored how teachers perceive the academic achievement of gifted Year 8 and Year 9 students .

This will be explored through the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How do teachers define the achievement of gifted students?

Research Question 2: How do classroom teachers define and understand the expected achievement (potential) of gifted students?

Research Question 3: What factors shape teacher perceptions of achievement for gifted students?

Research Question 4: What factors do teachers believe as important in influencing gifted students' achievement?

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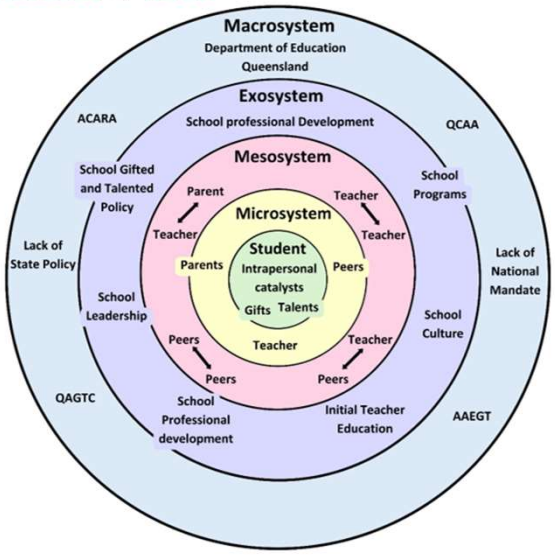
Theoretical Framework



Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Ecological Systems Theory in the Context of This Study

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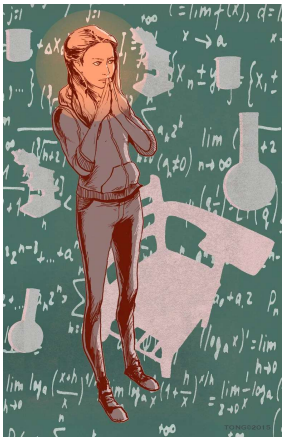
Methodology and Methods



Case study methodology allows the phenomenon of teachers' perceptions to be explored within a bounded system where the teachers' perceptions can be interpreted in context to uncover the interaction of significant factors within the case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995).

- SETTING: one Queensland state high school
- PARTICIPANTS: 7 classroom teachers
- SUBJECT AREAS: Mathematics, Science, English, Humanities, Special Education
- EXPERIENCE: 5-25+ years teaching
- STUDENTS: intellectually gifted students in Year 8 or 9
- METHOD: One semi-structured interview (~45 mins)

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Data Analysis and Key Findings - Themes

Braun and Clarke's (2021) approach to **thematic analysis (TA)**, following their six-phase analysis process was used to consolidate, reduce, and interpret the collected data within a constructivist framework, completed in **recursively and iteratively** to develop **5 key themes from the data** (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

🚧 **SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT LIMITATIONS** 🚧

"Has that A demonstrated development of their potential? I don't think so."

⚖️ **CURRICULUM COMPLIANCE STIFLING POTENTIAL** ⚖️

"I have to remind them, hey, don't race ahead… obviously they're bored."

👥 **GIFTED STUDENTS AS "OTHER" OR "SEPARATE"** 👥

"I'm able to give them a little bit more leash than other students in the class."

💝 **ENJOYMENT AND GROWTH AS ACHIEVEMENT** 💝

"At the end of the day, I want [them] to enjoy being in my classroom"

❓ **TEACHER UNCERTAINTY** ❓

"How do you do that? How far is too far?"

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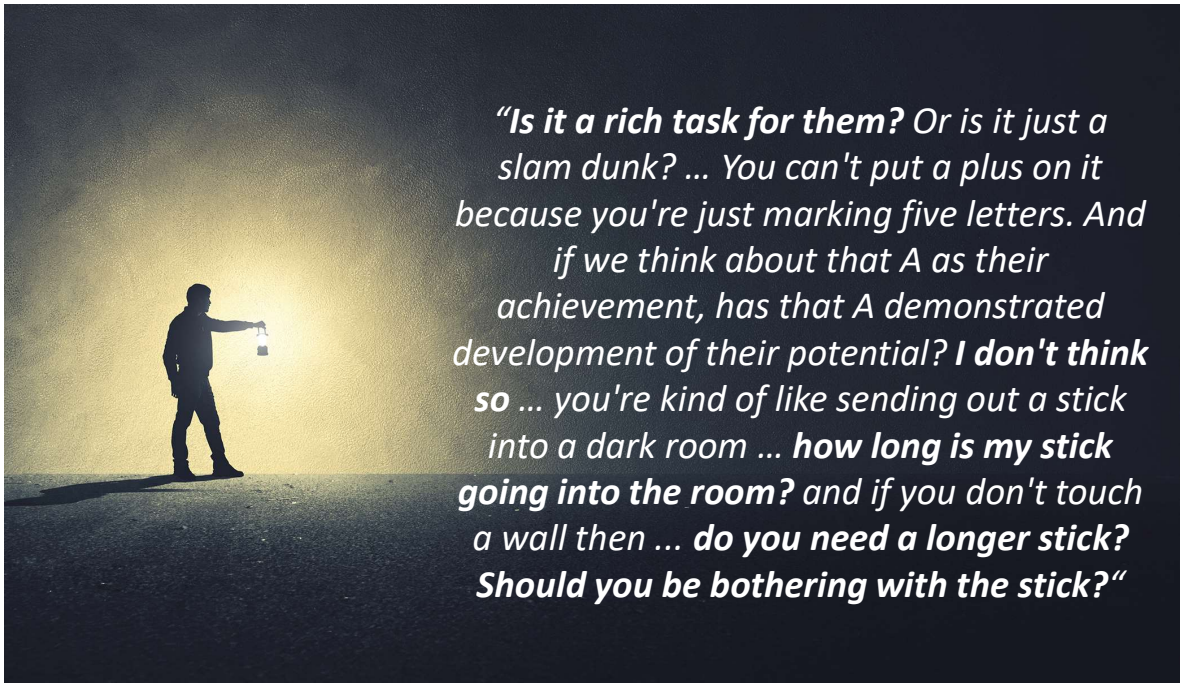

*"**Is it a rich task for them?** Or is it just a slam dunk? … You can't put a plus on it because you're just marking five letters. And if we think about that A as their achievement, has that A demonstrated development of their potential? **I don't think so** … you're kind of like sending out a stick into a dark room … **how long is my stick going into the room?** and if you don't touch a wall then … **do you need a longer stick? Should you be bothering with the stick?**"*

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Factors shaping Teacher Perceptions of Gifted Student Achievement

🌎 **MACROSYSTEM:**

Australian Curriculum Standards | QCAA Guidelines | Cultural Values

🏢 **EXOSYSTEM:**

School Assessment Practices | Curriculum Enactment | Limited PD | Lack of Gifted Education in ITE

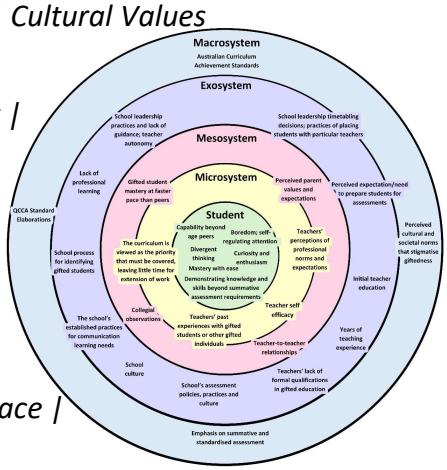
🤝 **MESOSYSTEM:**

Collegial Understandings and Assumptions

🎯 **MICROSYSTEM**:

👤 **GIFTED STUDENT:**

Capability beyond age-peers | Mastery with Ease | Pace | Divergent Thinking | Far Inferencing | Curiosity



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OBSERVED BEHAVIOURS:

- Self-regulating attention ("drifting in and out")
- Creating own challenges when curriculum insufficient
- Passive compliance despite boredom; waiting for class
- Decreasing motivation over time

RISK FACTORS:

- Covert underachievement or "invisible underachievement" (Mofield & Peter Parker, 2018; Reis & McCoach, 2000).
- Continuity of areas of weakness
- Decreased motivation and maladaptive outcomes (Hornstra et al., 2020; Kronborg et al., 2008)
- Adoption of achievement views and norms (Baudson & Preckel, 2016; Morisano & Shore, 2010) Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003).
- Social-emotional impacts (Blaas, 2014).

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What next?

For Teachers and School Leaders:

- Leverage flexibility within the Australian Curriculum, including General Capabilities for extension and enrichment (Wilson, 2024).
- Whole-school, multistakeholder approach to contextual policies and provisions
- Develop learning materials and resources to support differentiation through extension and enrichment
- Advocate for supportive policies and guidance

For System Leaders:

- Address policy-practice disconnects to create to flexibility
- School guidance and support
- Development of resources to support differentiation through extension and enrichment
- Provide professional development opportunities

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Questions?

You are most welcome to continue the conversation or ask additional questions:

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Abbreviations

AAEGT	Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
CARF	Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework (K-12 Framework)
DOE	Department of Education (Queensland)
DMGT	Differentiating Model of Giftedness and Talents
DYL	Different Year Level
ICP	Individual Curriculum Plan
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
QAGTC	Queensland Association of Gifted and Talented Children
QCAA	Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority
QSA	Queensland Studies Authority

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